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ABSTRACT

This study examined: (1) What reasons do mothers of 6- and 15-month-old babies give for returning to work?; (2) Are there broad dimensions of reasons why mothers return to work?; (3) Do the reasons mothers report returning to work differ according to mothers' education, income, occupation, or number of hours at work?; (4) Are the reasons mothers report returning to work related to their psychological well-being?; and (5) Do reasons for returning to work and number of hours of employment interact to affect well-being? Examination of data from Phase I of the NICHD Study of Early Childcare indicated that: (1) most mothers report returning to work for financial and personal fulfillment reasons; (2) personal fulfillment, financial, and parenthood dimensions exist in the present data, and these dimensions correspond with the types of reasons for employment suggested by related historical, empirical, and descriptive literature; (3) dimensions of reasons for employment were not associated with subjects' individual differences or well-being; (4) hours of employment and dimensions of reasons for employment may interact to affect mothers' well-being--in particular, personal fulfillment reasons for employment were related to lesser well-being when mothers work fewer hours when babies are very young, but when babies are older, this relationship is reversed; and (5) measured reasons for employment may not have differentiated mothers according to their most salient reasons for returning to work, and future research using measurement strategies to address this may find more systematic relations with maternal well-being. (EV)

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It's not what mothers do but the *reasons* that they do it: Maternal reasons for employment decisions and mothers' well-being

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SRCD Biennial Meeting
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Information about reasons mothers return to work is new and needed in that it fills gaps in existing literature. For instance, few studies have specifically measured mothers' reasons for returning to work. None have measured multiple possible reasons for employment. None have identified broad dimensions of reasons mothers return to work. In fact, I analyzed the NSCW 1992 (Galinsky, Families and Work Institute) data to create an empirical basis for my study. Despite this lack of research, mothers' reasons for returning to work are frequently the topic of media, political and academic discussions. Further, reasons mothers' return to work is a promising area of study for those interested in maternal well-being and child development because research findings show that mothers' subjective appraisal of their employment situation is a better predictor of their well-being than more simplistic measures such as hours of employment.

Mothers reasons for returning to work represents a means of assessing mothers' subjective appraisal of their employment. Past research findings indicate workers' subjective perception of their employment situation is a good predictor of well-being. By looking for possible interaction effects with hours of maternal employment, this study extends existing literature. In the last decade, researchers have reached consensus that efforts to understand the effects of maternal employment on parenting should include more consideration of contextual moderators and mothers' psychological process. Examination of mothers' reasons for returning to work and relations with well-being answers both of these calls.

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:
1. What reasons do mothers of 6 and 15 month-old babies give for returning to work?
2. Are there broad dimensions of reasons mothers return to work?
3. Do reasons mothers report returning to work differ according to mothers' education, income, occupation or number of hours at work?
4. Are the reasons mothers report returning to work related to their psychological well-being?
5. Do reasons for returning to work and number of hours of employment interact to affect well-being?

Participants

Data are from Phase I of The NICHD Study of Early Childcare, the most comprehensive study of childcare to date with 10 sites across the U.S.

>Approx. 1300 families participated in Phase I (infant ages 0-36 mos.)

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>450 families had mothers working 1+ hours and 'reasons' data
>present subsample is predominantly Caucasian, moderate SES
>~100 mothers work part-time; ~350 work full-time

Measures

Reasons for Returning to Work

The following items were presented to mothers employed one or more hours. Each item was rated by subjects according to 5-point Likert-type format.

"I am working right now because...
I enjoy what I do on the job".
I have a job that I don't want to lose".
My work is important to the way I see myself".
I feel I have something special to offer".
I feel that children benefit from being with different people in their early years".
Most of my friends and relatives have jobs".
The demands of my family don't occupy all my time".
I enjoy my (child/children) more when I am away from them some of the time".
My (husband/partner) wants me to have a job".
We need the income to support the family".
I want us to have money for extra things".

Based on a review of historical, empirical, and descriptive writings related to reasons mothers return to work, I conceptualized Personal Fulfillment, Parenthood and Family, and Financial dimensions of reasons mother return to work at 6 and 15 months after having a baby. Following is a summarization of how the three dimensions were conceptualized.

Personal Fulfillment Reasons for Returning to Work:

> Achievement	> Self-esteem	> Challenge
> Efficacy	> Mastery	> Competence
> Status	> Enjoyment	> Social relations

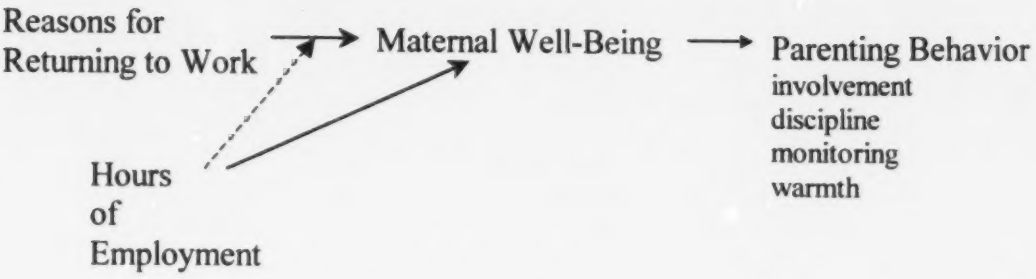
Parenthood and Family Reasons for Returning to Work:
> Providing high quality parenting
> Consideration of family goals and needs.

Financial Reasons for Returning to Work:
> Financial & fringe benefits resulting from employment

Well-being

Maternal well-being was assessed according to the absence of depression as measured by the CES-D. There is much precedent in psychological literature for using depression scores in this way. CES-D is appropriate for finding variance in depressive symptomatology in non-clinical populations.

Conceptual Model



Research Questions and Findings

1. What reasons do mothers of 6 and 15 month-old babies give for returning to work?

- Mothers reported personal fulfillment and financial reasons for returning to work with the greatest frequency at both six and 15 months.

2. Are there broad dimensions of reasons mothers return to work?

> Yes, factor analytical findings closely follow dimensions conceptualized for present study based on review of related historical, empirical, and descriptive writings.

Factor Analysis of Reasons at Six and 15 Months for All Employed Mothers

	Six Month Standardized factor loadings				15 Month Standardized factor loadings			
Factor and item	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Eigenvalue	3.90	1.76	1.17	1.12	4.23	1.69	1.37	1.10
% of Variance	27.87	12.57	8.35	7.98	30.24	12.05	9.82	7.83
Personal Fulfillment RFE								
Enjoy job	.80					.81		
Don't want lose job	.59					.59		
Self-image	.72					.76		
Have special skills	.72					.77		
Parenthood and Family RFE								
Children benefit				.64				.72
Friends and relatives work				.70				.45
Family doesn't occupy time				.61				.75
Enjoy children more				.58				.63
Financial RFE								
Need income					.67			.70
Husband wants her to work					.69			.72
Want money for extras					.35			.35

3. Do reasons mothers report returning to work differ according to mothers' education, income, occupation or number of hours at work?

> No, according to correlational analyses

Table 1. Correlations Among Demographic Variables & Maternal Reasons for Employment at 6 months

	Personal Fulfillment	Parenthood & Family	Financial
Hours/Week Employed	.05	.01	.08
Income/Needs Ratio	-.04	.05	-.07
Mother's Education	.02	.05	-.00
Occupation of Mother	-.02	.03	.03

Table 2. Correlations Among Demographic Variables and Maternal Reasons for Employment at 15 Months

	Personal Fulfillment	Parenthood & Family	Financial
1. Hours/Week Employed	-.02	.04	-.02
2. Income/Needs Ratio	-.01	.01	.01
3. Mother's Education	-.01	-.04	.10*
4. Occupation of Mother	-.06	-.04	-.08

Note. * indicates $p<.05$

4. Are the reasons mothers report returning to work related to their psychological well-being?

> Yes, according to Structural Equation Analyses

> Only Personal Fulfillment reasons were influential in predicting depression, and only for part-time employed moms

> PT employed moms at 6 months who report returning to work for personal fulfillment reasons reported less well-being. At 15 months working for personal fulfillment was associated with greater well-being.

Structural equation models were constructed with different constraints and compared on the basis of structural and measurement model fit. The models performed a confirmatory factor analysis to construct Personal Fulfillment, Financial, and Parenthood & Family dimensions of maternal reasons for employment. These dimensions served as predictors for maternal depression. Models with this structure were then compared for groups of mothers working full- versus part-time. In addition, separate models were

constructed for six and 15 months yielding a total of four models. In this way, number of hours of maternal employment was examined as a moderator of the relationship between maternal reasons for employment and depression at six and 15 months. Specificallly, at six months, mothers who worked part-time and reported they returned to work for personal fulfillment reasons such as "I enjoy my job" and "I have special skills to offer at work" scored lower on the measure of well-being. At 15 months these mothers reported greater well-being. Figures 1-4 contain structural equation models and are attached after conclusions.

Conclusions

1. Most mothers in the present sample report returning to work for financial and personal fulfillment reasons.

2. Personal Fulfillment, Financial, and Parenthood dimensions exist in the present data. These dimensions correspond with types of reasons for employment suggested by related historical, empirical, and descriptive literature.

3. Dimensions of reasons for employment were not associated with subjects' individual differences or well-being.

4. Hours of employment and dimensions of reasons for employment may interact to affect mothers' well-being. In particular, personal fulfillment reasons for employment in the present study were related to lesser well-being when mothers work fewer hours when babies are very young (6 months). When babies are older (15 months), this relationship reversed. Even though they worked few hours, mothers who worked for personal fulfillment reasons experienced greater well-being at 15 months.

5. Variability was constrained for mothers' report of reasons for employment by a positive response bias. The 14 reasons for employment may not have differentiated mothers according to their most salient reasons for returning to work. Future research utilizing measurement strategies to address this may find more systematic relations with maternal well-being.

6. More recent conceptualizations view well-being as multi-faceted indicating that a multiple-measures approach may provide a more valid assessment of well-being in future studies.

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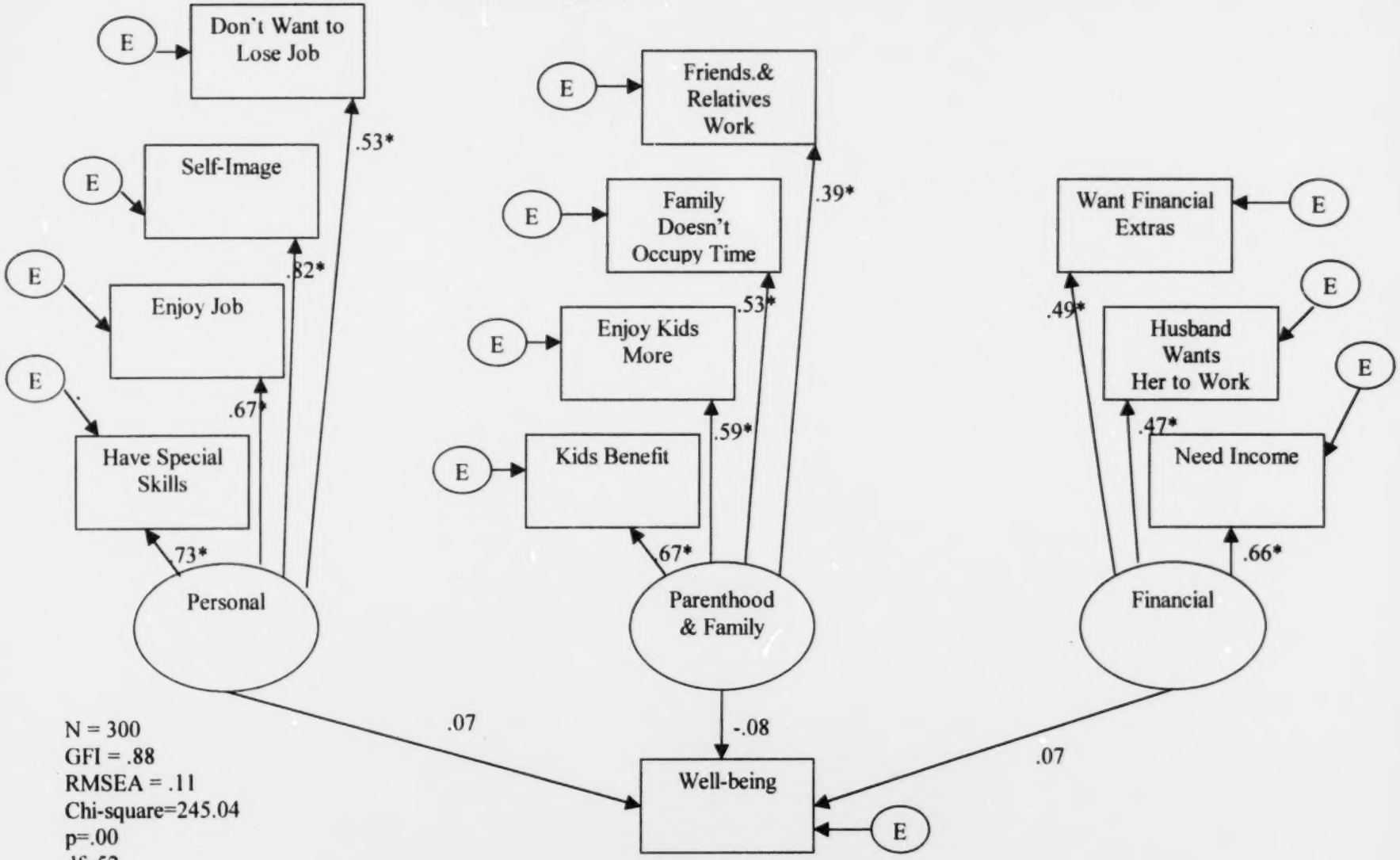

Figure 1. Relations Between RFE and Well-being at 15 Months for Mothers Employed 21+ Hours/Week.

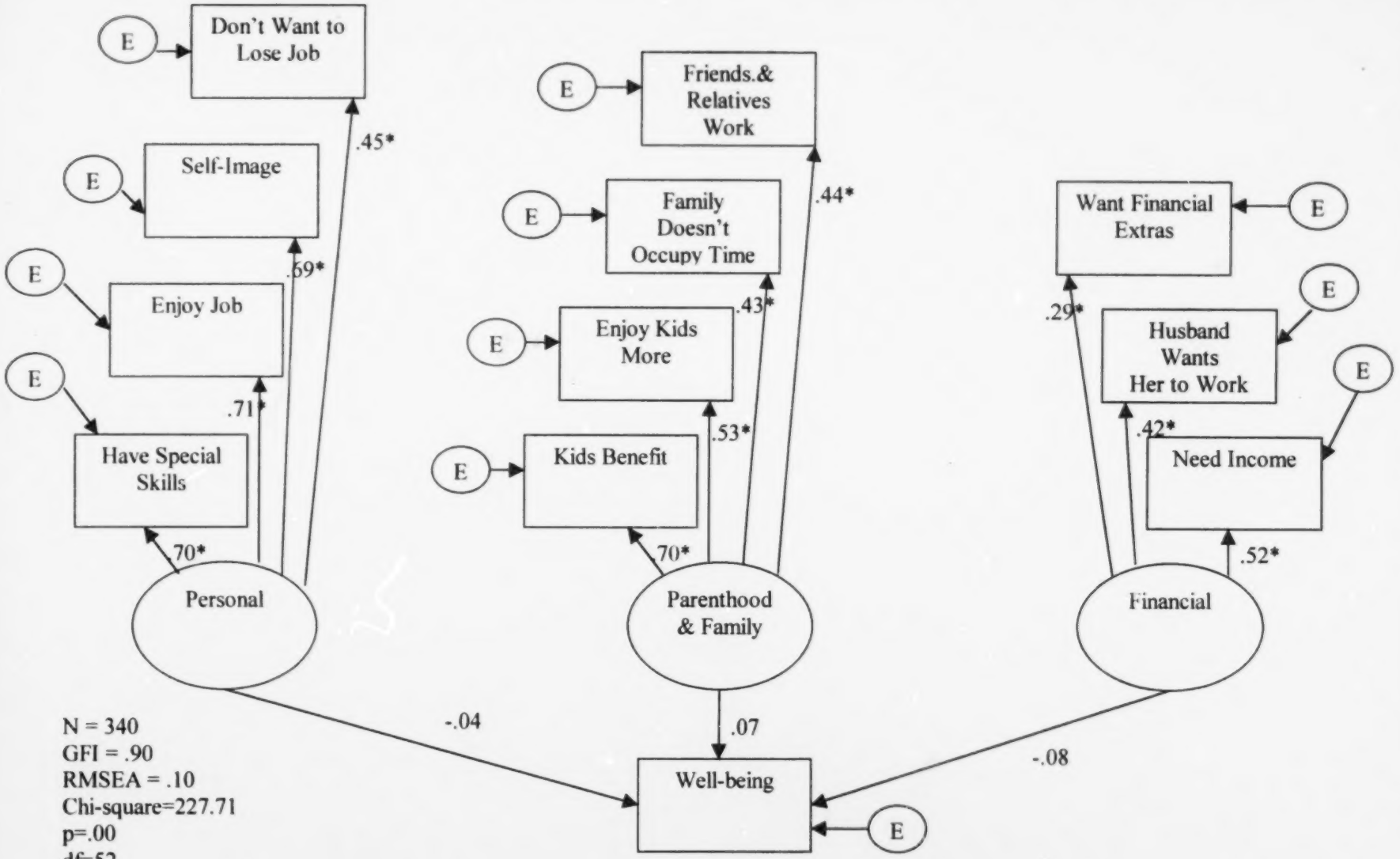

Figure 2. Relations Between RFE and Well-being at Six Months for Mothers Employed 21+ Hours/Week.

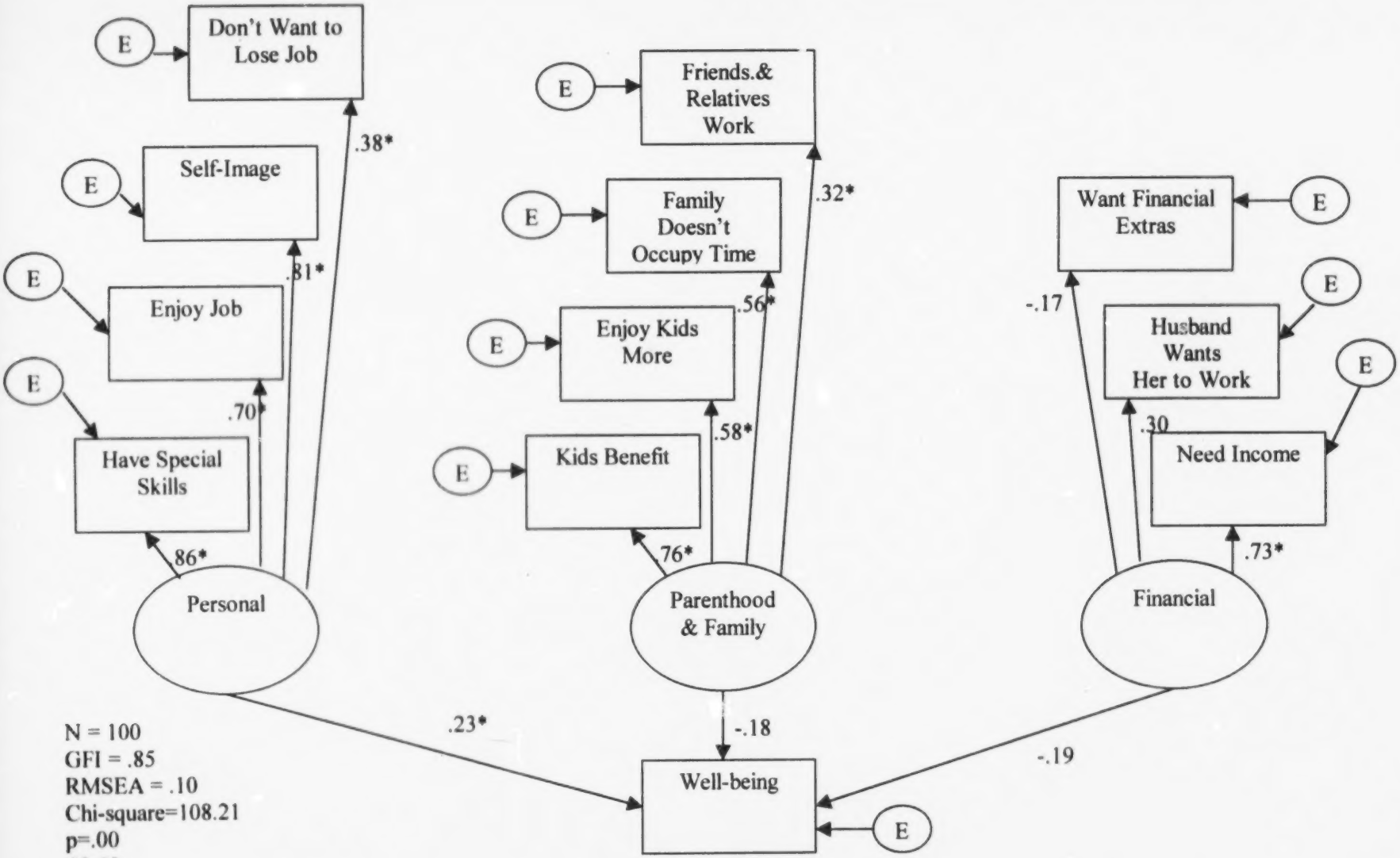

Figure 3. Relations Between RFE and Well-being at 15 Months for Mothers Employed 1-20 Hours/Week.

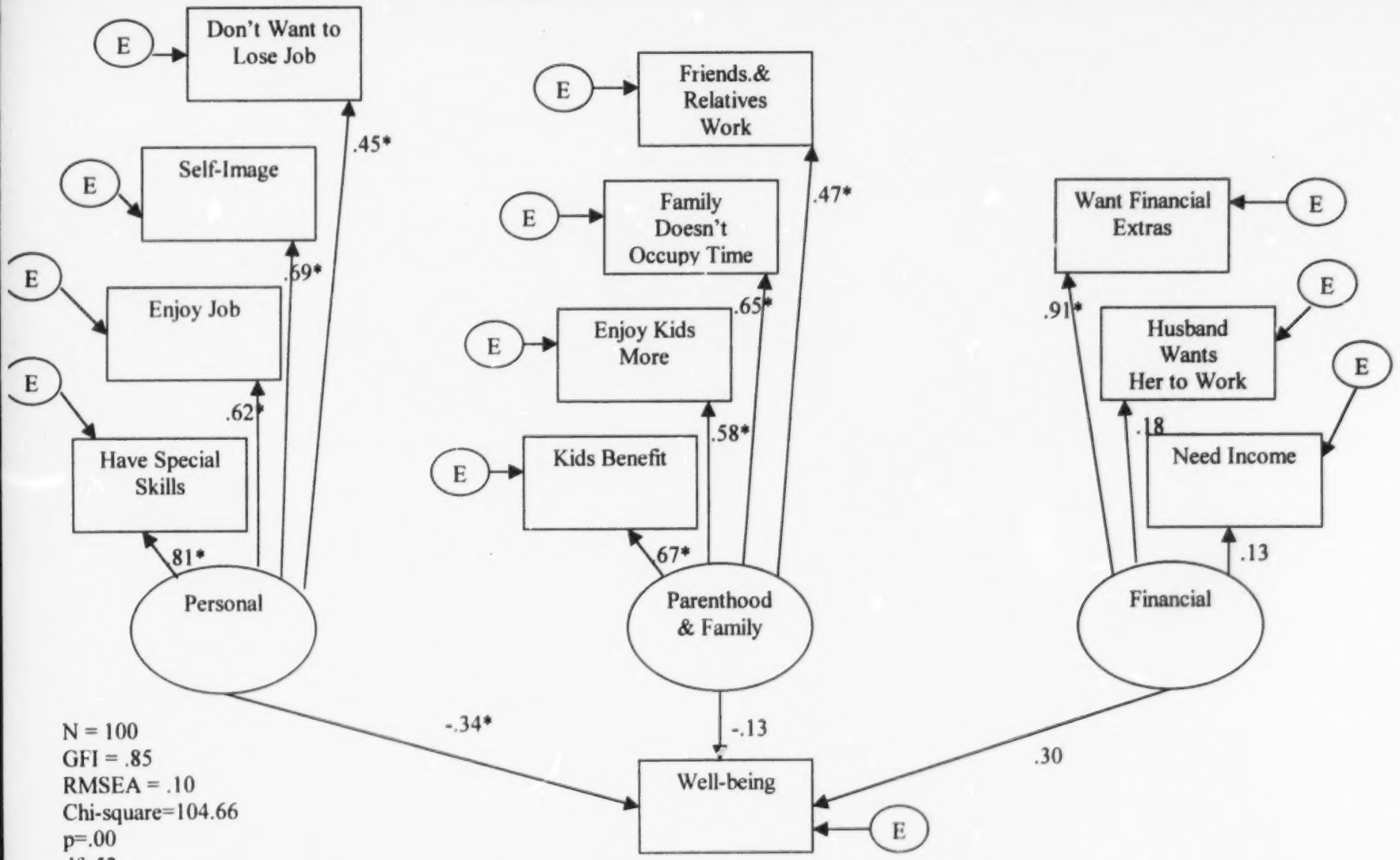

Figure 4. Relations Between RFE and Well-being at Six Months for Mothers Employed 1-20 Hours/Week.